

# Listen

## *A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction*

J A N U A R Y 2 0 1 7

V O L 1 1 : I S S U E 1

## INTERWEAVING CONNECTIONS

Yesterday I became a part of a miracle. At a women's summit, I learned we would be of service to two young women, and split into teams. Saint Vincent de Paul, a Catholic priest who lived in France in the late 1800s, came to mind. He believed in the reciprocity that can occur between those who are marginalized and poor, and those who are not. Twenty years ago I learned by experience that when we offer—or receive—service or care, unexpected lessons, healing, and connections can happen. During my initial training as a spiritual director, I connected with a woman, Mercedes, who was incarcerated. On the opening night of my training program, I received a card from Mercedes, and learned she was praying for me. My world flipped. We met in the prison a week later, for a one hour, once in a lifetime, conversation. I knew I would never see her again. The encounter disrupted and changed me. I was terrified—what would we talk about? Sitting together we tentatively smiled, and with a “hello...” conversation flowed, punctuated with mutual laughter and even tears. I discovered there was not much difference between the two of us, except choice and circumstance. Each of us received a gift from the time together.

On Saturday my team of eight was given two hours to determine how we could give a hand-up to a young woman whose primary life experience was homelessness, and put the plan



Spangled Cotinga — *Cotinga cayana*

into action. “V” had found her way to Covenant House, a shelter for youth who are homeless, learned skills, and set goals. She was in transition to her own living place, beginning college studies, and needed a warm winter coat and basic necessities. We could spend no more than USD\$50 each, but could tap any connections or resources in our circles. Our team split up, and three of us began our mission. I created a social media post explaining what we were doing and asked for assistance. Offers flooded in via text, calls, and private messages.

In ninety minutes, we returned with far more than the requested coat. Warm clothing, toiletries, bedding, and a backpack containing an iPad and keyboard were obtained through merchant gifts and items purchased with donations from friends. Gift cards for groceries, an inspirational book, journal, and piece of art were placed on a table. Our team looked at one another. Then, the door opened, and two girls entered, eyes growing wide with wonder, as were ours. The director of Covenant House had brought the

girls to our location. Listening to “V” share a few parts of her life story and goals, recognition swept through me that so little separates us when we open ourselves to vulnerability, compassion, and kindness with—and on behalf of—one another.

I believe that when we are brave enough to push beyond barriers of fear and bias, both within us, and in systems and culture, we will discover everything is possible. At times we act too swiftly or are indifferent to people and situations that can benefit from our discerned response. Please join me to explore these questions with a spiritual guide:

- Is there a person or group of people who I can connect with?
- What barriers do my own fear and bias create, limiting goodness and kindness to come alive through me?
- Is it challenging for me to receive from others?
- Who or what needs my action through service or advocacy?

—Pegge Erkeneff

### SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- Field Notes:  
*How do you connect...?*
- Global Resources
- Review: *It's All God, Anyway: Poetry for the Everyday*
- Poem: *Reality Hits*
- Ask Owl

## DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE BOOK, SONG, PERSON, OR COMMUNITY THAT CONNECTS YOU WITH YOUR FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY, OR THE MYSTERY SOME NAME GOD?

*Spiritual Directors International members respond:*

"For the past three years since I retired from work, my monthly supervision group of five spiritual directors has been my community of faith. I think of the group often between meetings. This is the group of people who 'get' me and my journey. We can be honest with one another about our doubts and our own spiritual practices. We are not required to be 'churchy' together, and that is very freeing, to me." —Mary Elyn Bahlert, California, USA

"A song, "Breathe," by Johnny Diaz, speaks to my soul. In this world of *fast ... everything*, this song reminds us to *breathe*. It definitely reminds me that there is so much more to life, and to spirituality than rushing around. We have to feed our own souls in order to *feed* the souls of others. We can only give what we ourselves have." —Michele Berrell, Georgia, USA

"One of my favorite mystics is Meister Eckhart. I have read many books about him, but my very favorite is Cyprian Smith's book, *The Way of Paradox, Spiritual Life as Taught by Meister Eckhart*. This is such an inspiring book! Meister Eckhart said that, 'our union with the all unitive Godhead is a union of birthing. We are to be birthers who are divinely fruitful.'" —Tanda Jo Ainsworth, California, USA

"With my community Saint Brigid of Kildare Methodist Benedictine Monastery, I strive to pray the daily offices. We are a distance community without a mother house, so all our prayers are connected through a conference call service. Praying the offices in community brings a sense of stability and a rhythm for life which grounds

my being. Just as we have the depiction of spiritual direction with three chairs symbolic of the spiritual directee, spiritual director, and the Divine, I find that the mysterious connection through the phone draws me into that third chair mystery which is the unseen God. Once a year we gather at the Abbey to pray with the monks and join in community face-to-face. This is a very enriching experience of prayer and an anchor to my faith." —Brenda Buckwell, Ohio, USA

"I have a spiritual direction group that has been meeting once a month for over fifteen years. These faithful companions on the journey keep me connected with my faith. We are mostly the same three, but have four at times. Our group includes a beginning *lectio divina* process and proceeds to discernment with spaces for silence. The group is of great value to each of us!" —Rev. Anne Wright Shelton, California, USA

"A favourite book is *The Shack* by Wm. Paul Young. It helped me understand how Father God sees us, His children, better than anything else. I didn't like the story to begin with—to be honest, who would? But, once I got past the awful tragedy that had taken place I could not put it down. One of the most significant things for me was when Mack meets with a woman in a tunnel. She does not tell him her name but their discussion is about judgement." —Vanessa Cooper, Warwickshire, UK

"I humbly suggest Judy Cannato's book, *Field of Compassion*, as a must read. It is a very readable introduction to the reality of exploring our 'inner space'

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and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org).



# FIELD NOTES, CONTINUED

from a quantum view, thanks to Cannato's expansive contemplative interior life." —Nancy Kennedy

"In my life, music has been meaningful and present. In this period, I feel it even more, because of my journey with music therapy. I experience each moment bringing me a new and deeper experience of God. Currently, an Argentinian song drives me close to my God's experience as a loving Mom who holds me in her hands, and looks at me with profound tenderness, The song is "Cancion para Verónica" by Teresa Parodi. To quote from the song, "The words, you know, are never enough, if what I want to say overflows my soul, but attend me, my dearest in your eyes I saw it this morning ..."

—Maria de Lourdes Lopez Munguia

"I have a favorite book, *Change Me Prayers* by Tosha Silver. Sometimes I read several pages, and other times I just open the book to a single page and read. Even the title of the book creates a connection for me. It has inspired me to make prayers cards for myself. The idea came to me one day to put prayer practices on cards for spiritual directions. How would your *change me prayer* read?"

—Cathy Lee Gigout, Texas, USA

"*The Fall of Freddy the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages* by Leo Buscaglia is one of my favorite books. Bascaglia wrote

this book for children who suffered a permanent loss, but I appreciate his message since it speaks of the seasons of my life similar to Ecclesiastes 3:1–2: 'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die.' The contents of a note found in Mr. Bascaglia's typewriter the day after his death stated: 'Every moment of unhappiness is a moment of happiness lost.' This note reminds me that I have 1,440 moments or minutes each day to count my blessings and thank God for his loving care in each season of my life."

—Marilyn D. Harris, MSN, RN, Pennsylvania, USA

Listen

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## Reality Hits

There is no holy leisure when you work in  
America

There are no sacred pauses

Certainly no Sabbath times

No respect for wanting the grand silence of a  
few hours

Not even on weekends

Not even when vowed disengagement  
surrounds the body

Like a barbed wire fence

The emails keep tumbling into the mailbox

Like landslides down the mountain path

Numbers of text messages multiply like red jelly  
beans

Calling me back into the pathological busyness

Of blog posts, social media boasts and tweeting  
about minutia

That say care more about budgets and deadlines  
And politics and meetings and technology

Than about yourself, other people

Love, inner peace and contemplation

Reality hits the runway like plane wheels during  
a rough landing

Bump, screech, hydraulic gravity push

Jarring the neck and shooting adrenaline like  
heroin

Challenging me to keep my feet on the ground

As I walk fervently down the spiritual path  
dedicated

To finding the thin places between matter and  
spirit, beauty and truth

In this ever-changing world

—Donna Erickson Couch, California, USA



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# ASK OWL

**Q**uestion: *Even though I pray and meditate, I find myself becoming restless and anxious when I witness anger and violence in the media, and in my own circles and community. I think tension in our world is growing, and I am triggered by the polarization I see between people and how people react to each other. It makes me sad, and I wonder why this has to be. Some days I feel hopeless—which is unusual for me. Will a spiritual director help me find focus and inner peace?*

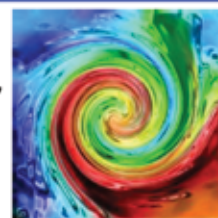
**R**esponse: Yes, a spiritual guide can offer a place of sanctuary where you can pause, listen to the stirrings within you, and orientate toward the Spirit some name God or the animating life force that is both stillness in our center, and stirring that moves us to action. In times like these, a spiritual director can be a person who is able to listen for a deeper—and even necessary—spirit which seeks to emerge, or invite us to slow down and rest a while, and gain perspective. The people and situations we surround ourselves with will influence us because our lives are interwoven with one another. Some of us are able to choose times to pause and find a life-giving place to do this. For others, because of circumstance, there is no place, except purely by decision and intention. A spiritual director will assist us to listen to what is most important and vital, and may even suggest books, music, activities, or new prayer methods that might be helpful. The place to start is with our basic foundations, and

go from there. For example, are you drinking enough water, sleeping several hours each night, eating healthy, moving in each day with activity, and adding contemplative practice and play into your day? A spiritual guide, or even a small group of companions, can remind us that we are the beloved, and our children, parents, family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, strangers, and even enemies need us to be centered and calm, forgiving, and focused. We must be good listeners—to ourselves, and others. It is then that connections are forged, and life is meaningful. A spiritual guide can be an excellent companion in times like these. 🍃

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail [Listen@sdiworld.org](mailto:Listen@sdiworld.org).

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# BOOK REVIEW

## *It's All God, Anyway: Poetry for the Everyday*

by Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016  
139 pages, CAD\$28.00, GBPE18.00, USD\$21.00, Reviewed by Diane M. Millis, PhD

In this delicious new book, Jinks Hoffmann offers a nourishing collection of poems for those who hunger to connect ever more intimately with all that is sacred. *It's All God Anyway* is a theological conviction Hoffmann both espouses through verse and enacts in daily life. Hoffmann brings to her writing over forty years of professional experience as a psychotherapist and spiritual director, along with fifty-two years of marriage, three children, eighteen grandchildren, and seven great-grands. Aptly subtitled *Poetry for the Everyday*, this collection consists of five sections: "A Way of Being in the World," "Mysticism," "The Work," "Family and Friends," "Roots," and is bookended by a provocative prologue and epilogue. In this, her first book, Hoffmann invites us to join her as she moves through her days. Activities include interpreting dreams, preparing meals, shoveling a neighbor's sidewalk, walking the beach, and reading in bed with her beloved husband Alan. As we do, she helps us to notice the subtle ways in which something bigger manifests in our midst.

The poems are stories about how Hoffmann looks and listens for the hidden dimension of existence. Moreover, many of her poems are in fact, prayers. They reveal her ongoing conversation with *my Love* (one of Jinks' names for God) to whom she regularly implores: *what now, my Love?* As I read, there were times I felt as if I were eavesdropping given the indelibly intimate nature of these exchanges. Yet, I couldn't help myself. I wanted to keep listening. As they speak to God, they censor little to nothing and in turn, seem to notice God responding in just about everything. Their boldness in addressing God points a way for more of us to do the same.

If you're looking for sentimental, feel-good spirituality, you will not find it in these pages. Hoffman is concerned with *shmutz* (a Jewish idiomatic expression for messy humanity). She is committed to daily *shmutz* cleaning, that is, attending to the places in her days and nights where she feels *shmutzy*, or messy—out of alignment, disgruntled, stirred. As such, these poems will prove especially helpful to spiritual seekers who question whether or not God can take their anger, their messiness, their *shmutz*.

Another notable feature of this collection is the playful and profound manner in which Hoffmann interweaves Jewish theology and idiom. These poems are bound to increase both spiritual directors and spiritual directees understanding of Jewish spirituality as well as expand our imagery of the Divine. Many begin with fascinating epigraphs drawn from a wide array of sources, ranging from Jewish theologian Michael Fishbane, to Sufi Saint Rabia of Basra, to Buddhist Suzuki Roshi, to conservationist Terry Tempest Williams, and to writer Garrison Keillor. This book is ideally suited for interfaith dialogue and retreats, for seekers without roots in a particular tradition, as well as those who draw upon the wisdom of more than one tradition, and as a text for spiritual direction formation and training programs.

Hoffmann's passion for sacred awakening is contagious. Be forewarned. Read only one poem, and you may catch it. As you do, trust that your spirit will be fed by "the Oneness at work without and within, in the midst of joy and sorrow, elation and suffering, evil and goodness, ..." as this collection so powerfully portrays.

—Diane M. Millis, PhD, is an educator, spiritual director, and author of *Conversation—The Sacred Art and Deepening Engagement*. She serves as director of the Journey Conversations Project, producer of *Lives Explored*, and teaches interfaith dialogue at Saint Catherine University, Minnesota, USA.

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—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

